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***“To Quick Witted Girls it’s a Real Game for Go-Getting Goal-Getting”: the All England Netball Association and the Development of Women’s Sporting Identities***

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When the Australian netball team agreed to tour England in 1956, new understanding of, and recognition for, the game was established. Organised by a select group of English women, who were instrumental in the formation and diffusion of netball’s values, these competitions provided the catalyst for the development of an international profile for the sport. Whilst histories of netball have been conducted on the leading nations, including Australia and New Zealand, England’s netballing history still lacks acknowledgment within both the public and academic sphere. Founded in 1926, the All England Women’s Net Ball Association provided governance for the sport, which was popularised in women’s physical education and speciality training colleges throughout England. This paper aims to detail the early history of netball through examination of its governing body, considering the individuals involved and their impact on the development of the sport’s national, and subsequent international, profile throughout the twentieth century.

## 1. Internationalisation of Netball

- In 1956, The All England Netball Association (AENA) began their drive towards internationalism by inviting the Australian team to tour England, playing 67 matches within their six-month residence. No surprise that Australia dominated this competition, as they still currently do! However, the purpose of this tour went beyond playing; demonstrations of coaching and tactics, and lectures around sport were all part of these exhibitions, with press keen to document these events. The aim of AENA was to generate discussions to provide international ruling for the sport; one in which the Australian team were open to explore.
- In 1957, a conference for developing the international rules was scheduled in London with delegates from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, Trinidad and South Africa in attendance. The final vision of international netball took time to develop, with further exhibition games, coaching and umpiring workshops, and lectures from touring teams used to implement and agree the final rules.
- When the International Federation of Women's Basketball and Netball (IFWBA; now the INF) formed in 1960 there was tribute given to AENA for their work in ensuring co-operation between the nations and they were honoured with selecting the first officers of the Federation as a result.
- However, in order to understand how netball became an "international" sport, we need to look to the past and consider how the sport developed...

## 2. Netball narrative

- Unfortunately, in England, this history has not been explored in detail, and the general history of netball's origins and governance is hidden.
- The current narrative is very limited! A rather potted history that states that netball formed from basketball and had a largely English influence before being diffused out through the Empire into Commonwealth countries. Whilst there are stronger narratives on Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, etc. the specific details and intricacies of these narratives are still missing (or, as I like to say, hidden) in both the public and academic sphere. We need to challenge this so we do not fall into the traps of regurgitating myths and fallacies!



### 3. Netball History – Timeline

- The current history of the sport's origins reads as follows:
  - Naismith was a physical educator and developed a sport for indoor participation that was less demanding than American football!
  - YCMA spread the rules of the games throughout the US and Canada, and Britain
  - However, game was not seen as appropriate for women so rules for a modified version of the sport started to be considered and "women's basketball" emerged.
  - However, there were many versions of female ball games which all emerged during the same period – so which game became netball? What were its original influences?
    - *Senda Berenson (women's physical educator in the US) credited with the origins of women's basketball but there was also Clara Gregory Baer's version of "women's basketball" that provided even more restriction on movement*
    - *Baer developed the game of "Basquette", used within the PE dept of Newcombe College, Louisiana, which was a six a side game with zones for the players to restrict movement and prevent exhaustion. Players were not able to dribble, guard or snatch the ball. Passes could be made between the players with three attackers, three defenders on each side of the court*
    - *Netball was played on the continent but was much more aligned to basketball – this is one of the issues as the terms seem to be used interchangeably!*
    - *American stage netball, "founded" by Jerry Hart and wife, Beatrice Leo – 5v5 games that could be easily transported around the country. Game similar to soccer except the foot cannot be used! Fouls caused by kicking/propelling the ball in any other manner than with the upper body, above waist area. Umpire's whistle signifies any rough play*
    - *Soccer grounds used to demonstrate netball (played by men with larger baskets) and Rugby netball emerges at a similar time*
    - *New Zealand established the first Netball Association in 1924: 9v9 netball*
  - During this period texts discuss netball and talk about its suitability as a girl's game
  - 1909 – discussion of hockey not being an appropriate sport for women – Physical Education teachers opinions – Mrs Woodward, head of British College of PE, says NO! Advocates other games such as cricket, lacrosse and netball
  - Netball amongst the favourite pastimes of girls by 1914 and other organisations, such as the girl guides, are triumphing netball for those aged 12 and over.
  - 1933 curriculum names netball as a winter sport for all girls (where it has remained)
  - 1935 rebrand to incorporate further "hand" games means that the AENA then looked after basketball, field handball, ha-ze-na (Czech handball), touch rugby and bounce handball. So what about netball's distinction; development of NGBs for these

additional activities did not occur until much later (post-WWII) so perhaps netball's identity in the formative years was not as clear as described?

- Issue here is the history of netball is much more multifaceted than saying there was only one influence and one route! Whilst we can mark key moments, the path taken to implement, develop and action these “moments” are just as important (if not more so!) in helping us to truly understand netball's origins, the English history and the greater international narrative which surrounds the sport. This paper will present a preliminary examination of netball's origins by considering aspects of the NGB's founders and how they can help to piece together the story of this important women's sport.

#### 4. Osterberg, PT College and Netball

- MBO, was one of the most formidable physical training instructors within the nineteenth century – trained in Stockholm as a mature student (aged 30), and indoctrinated into the Swedish gymnastics system which focused on posture, form and physiology; essentially “scientific” training
- Osterberg is credited as one of the founders of netball, although there are further layers to this (as mentioned previously)! The combination of American influence, communication with other educators, and MBO’s vision encouraged this new sport to blossom with the students at her PT college
- The college originally established in Hampstead in 1885, moved to a specialist facility in Dartford from 1895, was one of the most prominent and well-respected women’s training college within England
- Her facility was the only full-time physical teaching college for women at the time outside of the Royal Institute, Stockholm
- Her pupils went on to develop further women’s physical training colleges and influence the development of many sports, directly or indirectly!
- They followed the principles of MBO; system of Swedish gymnastics, games, dance, physique and health training.
  - Anstey – felt Dartford was elitist and MBO was snooty; wanted to have a more open college where all would feel welcome (working-class involvement). Women’s suffrage campaigner
  - Stansfeld – taught at Dartford before establishing Bedford – seen as a troublemaker and disloyal to her “master” when she left to form this new school!
  - Wilke – not trained by MBO but her programme was heavily influenced by her due to Dorette’s appointment of several ex-Dartford women, including EA Roberts before she went on to establish Dunfermline and Carnegie College in Scotland
  - EA Impey/Roberts – also previously appointed at Anstey College. Writer of *The Handbook of Free-Standing Gymnastics* – Ling standard for gymnastics/PE training. Founder and editor of *Journal of Scientific Physical Training* (1908-1929). On the first committee for netball rules in 1900, written at the time by the Ling Association
- Ling Association itself is interesting – formed by ex-Dartford women as an exclusive association for Dartford and Royal Central Gymnastics Institute, Stockholm, alumni
  - Swedish system preservation
- However, MBO was not happy with her students and wrote to them to state that she wanted no involvement with the organisation; removing herself as president elect of the organisation.

- Nonetheless, they continued and the women who became members of this organisation were influential in developing PE for women within UK
  - From 1904 they were able to set examinations and award their own diplomas
  - Inspected and endorsed colleges
- Ling had control over the formative years of netball – since 1900 rules were prepared and issued by them, but this changed with the establishment of a separate NGB



## 5. AENA - What we know about the NGB

- Formed in 1926
- Inaugural meeting at the YWCA
- Combination of Ling/London and Home Counties Netball Federation (1924) membership
- Problems: earliest records of the organisation are 1929 so can only trace full membership from this date (not uncommon for records surrounding women's sport to be destroyed or go missing – still the case today unfortunately!)
- Important to consider as this may help identify the origins and development/direction of the sport

## 6. AEWNBA & Founding Members – Key Individuals

- Research currently is at the point where I am looking to complete more complex biographies of these women and these will then be used to complete a prosopographical analysis of female administrations of sport. I am hoping to see if there is a pattern of behaviours, identities, ideas, etc. that help us to identify the key traits of these individuals who were instrumental to the development of many women's sport during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.
- General points; all were trained PT instructors/teachers, involvement in activities was always to a very high standard, either as athletes, coaches or administrators, and they continued to be active within these committees until their deaths – shows dedication and commitment to improving women's health and fitness.

### Edith R. Clarke (President)

- Physical Training Instructress (Brighton)
- Lecturer in Gymnastics/Games Coach (Dartford PT and Uni of London)
- School's Inspector (HMI)
- Graduate of Dartford PT College
- Graduate of Uni of London
- **Hockey & Lacrosse international (captain of England Lacrosse since 1913)**
- **Tennis player at Wimbledon**
- **Author of articles on Hockey and Lacrosse coaching**

Doris M. Wilkie (Chair until her death in 1963, just before the first World Cup competition)

- Senior Gymnastics Mistress (South)
- Lecturer in Physical Education (Bedford PT College)
- Graduate of Bedford PT College
- Secretary of Ling Association from 1929
- **Author of several “Net Ball” texts 1930s – tactically driven**
- **Joined the war effort as a volunteer ARP warden and ambulance driver in 1939 (before conscription); seemed to be a pattern of many of these women – suggesting an attitude that goes beyond sport but to public health, women’s rights and social equality**

Muriel O. Newbold

- Gymnastics Mistress (Queen Anne’s School)
- Lecturer in Physical Training (Chelsea PT College)
- **Private Coaching from 1927**
- Graduate of Anstey PT College
- **Lacrosse international**
- **Author of Lacrosse material – American/positional awareness/schools and club information (with Kathleen Lockley) c.1920s-30s**
- **Post-humorous life honorary membership to the US Women’s Lacrosse Association (1981)**

Cicely “Birdie” Read

- VP and Principle of Bedford from 1909-death (1949)
- Incredible lonely and frustrated women but very clever and had outstanding achievements
- **Choreographing of mass events, such as Wembley’s 1937 display in front of the King and Queen**
- **Author of texts for Vaulting for women and girls c. 1930s**
- **Author of text on Lacrosse umpiring in 1966**
- Close with Spafford, who in turn, was close with Colson; all instrumental in the Bedford College – Read first head after Stansfeld’s retirement. DM Wilkie helped, Spafford took over as principle in the interim before appointment of Eileen Alexander

Initial prosopographical analysis of these women, which focuses on school affiliation, can help to identify whether the origins of the sport are as documented – MBO developed and invented sport...

- There is some influence from those directly trained by MBO at Dartford on the sport's governance but, there seems to be more women who came through other college systems who sit in more prominent positions.
- Many have come into contact with the sport through second-hand instruction (essentially being taught by women who were trained by MBO but would have developed their own delivery of the sport).
- Furthermore, the number of committee members who have not had direct influence from MBO and Dartford College is just as large.
- This suggests that whilst there is clearly influence of MBO within the sport, its governance and rules by 1926 were perhaps a modified version of the sport that had evolved from interactions between women from different backgrounds and training pedigrees who had exported the sport out to the masses. Not necessarily the version of netball "invented" in Dartford College in the 1890s, with new ideas and attitudes shaping the sport's ruling.

## 8. Conclusions

- Early conclusions drawn from the analysis of the research thus far suggest that:
  - a. Definitely Osterberg/Dartford version of the games
  - b. However, women's involvement lacked class restrictions as experienced in some other sports
  - c. Philanthropic activities; about encouraging health and wellbeing through sport
  - d. Sport open to all
  - e. Success because of these women who were advocates for sport and women's health – many make this their life's work! Lifestyles a reflection of this.
  - f. Suffrage? Feminists? Moving women's position in society forward – breaking down the barriers with activities such as netball.
  
- Clearly, netball's history actually cannot be effectively examined without understanding the grander narrative that surrounds women's history, physical education and the constant pressure that these women were putting on British ideologies and attitudes in order to pave the way for women's liberation in the twentieth century. Essentially, this is much more than just one sport! But it's a good place to start...